

22. (Twice amended) In an asymmetric communication system including a server, a plurality of clients, a shared first channel for sending packets from the server to the plurality of clients, a plurality of second channels for sending packets from the clients to the server, a method of operating one of the clients, the method comprising the steps of:

sending operability indication messages on one of the second channels;

receiving a first plurality of packets sent from the server, by receiving the first plurality of packets from the first shared channel at a first speed, each of the first plurality of packets including an internetwork header with an internetwork address associated with the one of the clients;

sending a second plurality of packets to the server, by sending the second plurality of packets over the one of the second channels at a speed lower than the first speed, each of the second plurality of packets including another internetwork header with the internetwork address associated with the one of the clients;

receiving a second message; and

sending operability indication messages on another one of the second channels, the other one of the second channels being determined by the message received in the step of receiving the second message.

226. (Amended) The method of claim 22 wherein the plurality of second channels includes a telephone network, and the step of sending the second plurality of packets includes:

sending the second plurality of packets over the telephone network.

30. (Amended) The method of claim 22 wherein the first channel includes

a satellite broadcast network, and the plurality of second channels include a telephone network, and the step of the second plurality of packets sending includes:

sending a signal over the telephone network.

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~~31~~. (Amended) The method of claim ¹~~22~~, wherein each of the plurality of second channels have respective frequencies in a cable network, and the step of sending the second plurality of packets includes transmitting on one of the respective frequencies.

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~~32~~. (Amended) A client for an asymmetric communication system including a server, a shared first channel for sending packets from the server, the shared first channel, a plurality of second channels for sending packets to the server, the client comprising:

a receiver that receives a first plurality of packets sent from the server, by receiving the first plurality of packets, by receiving the first plurality of packets from the first shared channel at a first speed, each of the first plurality of packets including an internetwork header with an internetwork address associated with the client; and

a transmitter that transmits periodic operability indication messages on one of the second channels and, responsive to a received message received by the client, subsequently transmits periodic operability indication messages on another one of the second channels, the other one of the second channels being determined by the received message, and transmits a second plurality of packets to the server, by sending the second plurality of packets over the one of the second channels at a speed lower than the first speed,

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each of the second plurality of packets including an internetwork header with the internetwork address associated with the client.

¹⁶~~40~~. (Amended) The communication system according to claim ¹⁵~~39~~ wherein the control system further includes

a detector that detects a quality characteristic of a communication channel,

wherein the channel switcher switches to another communication channel depending on the detected quality characteristic.

¹⁷~~41~~. (Amended) The communication system according to claim ¹⁶~~40~~ wherein the channel switcher comprises circuitry configured for switching to another communication channel if the detected quality characteristic deviates sufficiently from a norm.

¹⁸~~42~~. (Amended) The communication system according to claim ¹⁷~~41~~ wherein the quality characteristic is one of time from last operability indication, signal-to-noise ratio, error frequency and busy signal.

¹⁹~~43~~. (Amended) The communication system according to claim ¹⁵~~39~~ wherein the shared medium comprises one of a hybrid fiber coaxial cable, an over-the-air broadcast medium, a cellular broadcast medium, a direct satellite broadcast medium, a CATV broadcast and an RF radio broadcast and wherein one of the at least one of upstream channel is one of a selected lower speed upstream channel located on the shared medium, a lower speed telephone return line, a lower speed cellular return channel, an over-the-air RF transmission and a point-to-point electromagnetic transmission.

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~~44~~. (Amended) The communication system according to claim ¹⁵~~39~~, wherein the channel switcher comprises:

equipment for determining the availability of at least one channel; and
a channel selector for selecting as other channel a suitable channel
from available channels.

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~~45~~. (Amended) The communication system according to claim ²⁶~~44~~, wherein the channel selector operates to select channels based on suitability factors of the available channels, the factors including at least one of channel quality, type of service required, operating characteristics of a client associated with the communication channel and configuration restrictions.

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~~46~~. (Amended) The communication system according to claim ²⁶~~44~~, wherein the channel selector comprises:

a sender that sends a message to a remote interface associated with the communication channel, the message requesting the remote interface associated with the communication channel to switch to a different channel, and

a receiver for receiving a response from the remote interface on the different channel.

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~~47~~. (Amended) The communication system as in claim ¹⁵~~39~~ further including a detector that detects a characteristic of said upstream channel, the detector operating at an upstream location.

~~25~~²⁴49. (Amended) The communication system according to claim ~~48~~²⁴ wherein the network management system further includes

a detector that detects a quality characteristic of a communication channel, wherein the switcher switches to another communication channel based on the detected quality characteristics.

^{CS} ~~25~~²⁴50. (Amended) The switcher according to claim ~~48~~²⁴ wherein the switcher comprises circuitry configured for switching to another channel if a detected quality characteristics deviates sufficiently from a reference.

~~27~~²⁴51. (Amended) The switcher according to claim ~~48~~²⁴ wherein the switcher comprises:

circuitry configured for switching to another communication channel based on sufficient deviation of detected quality characteristics from corresponding predetermined norms.

~~28~~²⁴52. (Amended) The switcher according to claim ~~48~~²⁴ wherein quality characteristics are selected from time from last operability indication, signal-to-noise ratio, error frequency and busy signal.